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IL CONGRESSIONAL COALITION DEMANDS ANSWERS ON FAA'S PLAN TO RELOCATE 100 WORKERS FROM DES PLAINES TO TEXAS

LETTER TO ADMINISTRATOR BLAKEY QUESTIONS PLAN'S IMPACT ON WORKERS, O'HARE MODERNIZATION AND SAFETY

WASHINGTON, DC -- - A bi-partisan coalition of members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation today sent a letter to FAA Administrator Marion Blakey demanding answers on a plan to displace approximately 100 workers from the FAA's Great Lakes Regional Office in Des Plaines. The letter was signed by U.S. Senators Dick Durbin and Barack Obama, and U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Mark Kirk, and Melissa Bean.

The FAA notified employees in its Des Plaines office in December 2005 that as part of its restructuring effort, around 100 employees would be moved from Des Plaines to Fort Worth, TX in the second half of 2006. Dozens of workers in the Des Plaines regional office are waiting in limbo to find out whether they will be asked to relocate to Texas.

"The FAA must explain how moving well-trained workers 1,000 miles away will help to complete the O'Hare modernization project and to maintain safety in the skies over Chicago," said U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, whose district includes the FAA's Great Lakes Regional Office. "Workers in Des Plaines are tired of being kept up in the air about whether they will have to move. The FAA should level with its employees by giving immediate notice and a sufficient explanation to all of those who will be asked to relocate."

"The proposal to relocate 100 experienced air traffic professionals from the Des Plaines area not only hurts Illinois families, it threatens to jeopardize air traffic safety in the Chicago area," said Durbin. "Plans to modernize O'Hare are dependent on the contributions of these highly trained professionals. The FAA owes these employees and their families a clear explanation of the proposal and plenty of advance notice if a move becomes necessary."

A full copy of the letter is below:

Dear Administrator Blakey:

We are writing to express our serious concern about the FAA's recent decision to relocate approximately 100 critically necessary employees from the Great Lakes Regional Office in Des Plaines, Illinois to a facility in Fort Worth, Texas, as part of plans to restructure the Air Traffic Organization (ATO). We question not only the transparency of this process, but also the impact it will have on the Chicago-area aviation community.

We believe this relocation could seriously impair air traffic control and safety operations in and around Chicago, which is among the busiest air transportation hubs in the world. We have appreciated your ongoing cooperation with various phases of approval for the O'Hare Modernization Program and know that you are well aware of the improvements that are needed to relieve air traffic congestion in Chicago's skies and eliminate the delays that are created at airports across the nation as a result of O'Hare's present capacity limitations.

The decision to move 100 experienced FAA air traffic professionals, including Safety Program Managers, Implementation Engineering Program Managers, Airport Implementation Engineers, Operations Liaison Engineers, and Air Traffic Requirements Staff Specialists from the Great Lakes Regional Office in Des Plaines to the Fort Worth facility raises serious questions about the FAA's commitment to the success of the modernization process at O'Hare.

Furthermore, we are troubled by the manner in which the FAA has approached informing the affected employees about the ATO restructuring process and relocation plans so far. We understand that in December 2005, the FAA notified employees at the Great Lakes Regional Office that approximately 100 employees would be moved to Fort Worth between June and December of 2006. However, the FAA has yet to specifically identify or inform the individuals who will be told to relocate, leaving these employees and their families in a state of limbo regarding their future. Under the Engineers' and Architects' current collective bargaining agreement, the FAA is required to provide these employees with at least nine months' notice before their positions may be relocated. If the FAA intends to move these individuals to Fort Worth as early as June 2006, the agency could be found to stand in violation of this bargaining agreement.

It is our hope that you will be able to provide us with more information about the FAA's

rationale for relocating as many as 100 of our constituents and their families to Fort Worth. Specifically, we are interested in a detailed explanation of the air traffic safety implications of this plan, the timeline for the proposed relocation, the process by which employees will be consulted and informed about the relocation of these positions, and the costs or savings that will be associated with this plan. We also expect that you will keep us apprised of all other phases of the ongoing reorganization of the ATO, especially in regard to the impact for the Chicago-area aviation community.

Thank you for your attention to this request. Your timely response to our concerns will be appreciated. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that Chicago's air traffic system remains as safe and efficient as possible.